THE NORMATIVITY OF LANGUAGE GAMES IN THE CONTEXT OF PSYCHOANALYSIS AND MENTAL HEALTH

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Abstract

Language profoundly shapes human perception and social interactions. Sigmund Freud emphasized the role of language in uncovering and addressing unconscious conflicts, particularly in the treatment of mental illness. Ludwig Wittgenstein examined the everyday use of language through his concept of "language games," thereby revealing its normative function in shaping meaning, behavior, and societal norms. This paper compares Freud's and Wittgenstein's approaches to language, highlighting their shared emphasis on its normativity and therapeutic potential. While their perspectives differ — Freud focusing on the unconscious structures underlying speech and Wittgenstein on the rule–governed nature of language use — they both illustrate that language is an active force that shapes human experience rather than a passive medium. Finally, the paper argues that Freud's insights into the symbolic dimensions of language and Wittgenstein's emphasis on linguistic practice together suggest the need for a culturally sensitive and holistic approach to therapy.

KEYWORDS: Sigmund Freud, language, language games, psychoanalysis, Ludwig Wittgenstein

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Introduction

Language expressions significantly shape our understanding of the world, especially in areas as complex as mental health. Terms such as "mental illness," "madness," and "insanity," along with diagnostic categories from psychiatric classifications like the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM–V) not only describe phenomena but also influence how they are perceived and categorized within society. This interplay between language and perception invites us to consider how linguistic frameworks shape our understanding of mental illness. To explore this, we turn to two influential figures whose work intersects with language, perception, and mental health: Sigmund Freud and Ludwig Wittgenstein.

Psychoanalysis emerged in Vienna in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, where Freud began to develop his theories. His work was largely influenced by the medical and scientific discourses of his time. However, he also considered "talk therapy" to be an essential aspect of healing patients with mental health issues. As a result, he laid the foundation for contemporary psychotherapy. Wittgenstein's early philosophy was influenced by the early analytic philosophy tradition, especially Frege and Russell, as well as the philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer (who also influenced Freud) and Immanuel Kant. Wittgenstein's later approach was presented in his posthumously published *Philosophical Investigations* (PI) and influenced what is known as the philosophy of ordinary language.

Although they may seem unrelated, psychoanalysis and Wittgenstein's later philosophy share common themes and concerns. Indeed, similarities between their approaches have already been mentioned in the literature. Gordon Baker has, for instance, claimed that "there was a definite phase of Wittgenstein's thinking in which close comparison with Freud's methods informed his own conception of philosophical investigation" (2004, 155). This conception "arguably ... continued to dominate Wittgenstein's later work" (Baker 2004, 201 n.3; see also Wisdom 1969; Lazerowitz 1977; Guillot 2004; Backström 2013; Sparti 2014).

Wittgenstein and Freud were both interested in language, meaning, and the nature of subjectivity (Bouveresse 1995). The psychoanalytic approach involves analyzing the patient's speech and behavior to reveal unconscious conflicts and desires. Wittgenstein, in PI, started from the concept of language acquisition in childhood.[1] Later in this work, he was interested in how language is used in everyday life and developed the concept of "language

1 Note that the concept of a child is rare in analytic philosophy, preventing it from recognizing psychoanalysis as one of its others (Peters 2015), but its place in PI opens a space for comparing these two approaches.

games," which all participants must accept to belong to a particular community. They should also use words in their ordinary meaning and agree on what is true and false (PI §241).

The central hypothesis of this paper is that language games — as conceptualized by Wittgenstein in PI and Freud's theory of unconscious processes — both have a normative dimension, particularly in the context of mental health. Freud's theory of the unconscious includes symbolic expressions (e.g., dreams, slips of the tongue, and symptoms) that can be viewed as specific types of "games" with their own rules that are not always transparent to the individual.[2]

Further in this paper, it will be contended that both Freud and Wittgenstein demonstrate that language can function as a therapeutic tool, enabling individuals to achieve clarity and insight by navigating the linguistic practices' underlying rules and structures. This paper will explore this perspective by examining the therapeutic power of language as a shared practice for understanding and transformation.

Although existing studies have drawn parallels between Wittgenstein's philosophy and Freud's psychoanalytic method, this paper focuses specifically on the normative aspects of language in both thinkers. This allows an exploration of how their perspectives can be integrated into a broader understanding of normativity in linguistic and psychological frameworks. The paper also examines whether normativity can be understood in the same way within both frameworks or whether it takes on distinct meanings for each thinker. By analyzing these differing foundations, the paper aims to clarify whether and how their respective views on normativity can be meaningfully compared.

1. *The Role of Language in Psychoanalysis*

Freud's view of language involves two distinct elements: the representation of words and the representation of things. Meaning is, in turn, created through a complex web of associations between these two elements (An-

2 It could be objected that the claim proposed in this paper — that the rules of a language game need not be transparent — conflicts with Wittgenstein's well–known assertion that "nothing is hidden" (PI §435, §559). However, this statement is best understood as a rejection of the idea that meaning in language is grounded in hidden, private, or inaccessible mental states. Linguistic meaning is determined by the way words are used in everyday life rather than by some inner realm. This does not imply that individuals fully comprehend the rules of the games they participate in or that they are always aware that they are engaged in such games (at least not until they encounter Wittgenstein's theory, which remains unfamiliar to most). This is the sense in which "transparency" (or its absence) should be understood. I am grateful to a reviewer for drawing my attention to this issue.

drade 2016).[3] Laplanche and Pontalis (1988) argue that Freud's concept of thing–representation can be seen in his work, which often expresses mnemonic traits represented by perceptual signs in the relevant context. According to Freud (SE 14, 182), the representation of things (or a mental image of a definite object) can be considered an independent psychic formation. It can endure in the absence of the actual object, even though it may have been constructed in perception. That said, such a formation is also an investment in memory — a link between the perception of the object and the memory traces left by earlier perceptions of it. For Freud, this idea of the representation of things is closely related to the concept of the representation of words, and both ideas are associated with different levels of consciousness.

Freud believes that language is essential in distinguishing between the conscious and unconscious thought processes. He maintains that linguistic representations make up the preconscious system and that the verbal expression of a thing's representation is necessary to bring it into consciousness. However, even though the preconscious system is associated with word–representations, this does not necessarily make it conscious (SE 14). Therefore, while language is primarily associated with ego function, some aspects — such as slips of the tongue (Freud 1910) and dreams (SE 4) — can also be viewed as a path to the unconscious. This duality of language (as both a means of conscious expression and a gateway to unconscious conflicts) underscores its central role in psychoanalysis. Freud's emphasis on nonverbal cues and symbolic representations reveals that language extends beyond mere communication; it functions as a mediator between the conscious and unconscious mind. Therefore, unconscious conflicts and desires that cannot be directly expressed by referential language can be expressed through various nonstandard elements of language. According to Freud, nonverbal cues and subtly expressed desires account for a significant

3 Freud's account of representation — particularly his distinction between representations of things and representations of words — suggests an implicit commitment to a form of mentalism. Here, the meaning of words is tied to internal mental states (whether conscious or unconscious). This interpretation raises an interesting tension in relation to Wittgenstein's critique of mentalism in PI, where he rejects the idea that meaning is reducible to mental phenomena occurring in the minds of speakers and listeners. Wittgenstein's private language argument (PI §§243–271), in particular, challenges the notion that linguistic meaning could be grounded solely in subjective mental representations. In such cases, meanings would lack public criteria for correctness. While Freud's view differs from classical mentalism by allowing for unconscious representations, it remains debatable whether Wittgenstein's critique of mentalism can fully apply to Freud's account. A possible response is that Freud does not propose a theory of meaning in the Wittgensteinian sense but rather a theory of how internal psychic structures shape the production and reception of linguistic expressions. Exploring this tension further could illuminate deeper differences between Wittgenstein's and Freud's views on the role of language in structuring human experience. I am grateful to a reviewer for drawing my attention to this issue, which opens an important avenue for further reflection.

portion of human communication. Moreover, language used to conceal or disclose unconscious conflicts is a crucial component of human communication. (SE 4, 222)[4]

2. *The Role of Language in Wittgenstein's* Philosophical Investigations

In a letter to Norman Malcolm, Wittgenstein claimed that he was greatly impressed when he first read Freud, although "he is full of fishy thinking and his charm and the charm of his subject is so great that you may be easily fooled" (Bouveresse 1995, xix). Jacques Bouveresse (1995) argues that Wittgenstein was not interested in psychoanalysis as a therapeutic practice or a scientific theory but was rather fascinated by Freud's ideas about the nature of human experience and the limitations of language. He claims that Wittgenstein was drawn to Freud's ideas because they challenged traditional philosophical assumptions about the nature of language, meaning, and subjectivity. Nevertheless, as we will see, Wittgenstein was a critical reader of Freud's work and used it as one of the points of departure for his theory about the nature of language and human experience.

One of Wittgenstein's central concepts is that language is a social practice[5] profoundly intertwined with context and culture, which is connected to his notion of *language games*. Wittgenstein coined the term "language

4 Wittgenstein acknowledged that Freud's psychoanalytic method introduces a new means of representation rather than revealing objective psychological truths. In *Lectures, Cambridge 1932–1935* (2001), Wittgenstein remarks that Freud's interpretation of dreams operates as a new way of structuring and making sense of experience rather than as an empirical discovery about the unconscious. A similar perspective is found in the *Blue Book* (1965), where Wittgenstein suggests that psychoanalysis offers a novel conceptual framework rather than a set of verifiable statements about mental processes. This perspective aligns with Wittgenstein's broader view that meaning is not an inherent property of mental states but is shaped by the representational tools and interpretative structures we employ. The idea that Freud's work constructs a "new language" rather than uncovering hidden psychological facts highlights an important methodological contrast between the two thinkers: While Freud sought to access unconscious content through interpretation, Wittgenstein's focus was on how different *ways* of speaking structure our understanding of psychological phenomena. I am grateful to a reviewer for pointing out this connection, which further clarifies the interpretative nature of Freud's psychoanalytic method in relation to Wittgenstein's philosophy of language.

5 It could be objected that the discussion of Wittgenstein does not sufficiently distinguish between the collective/social and the interpersonal. While this distinction is important at a more fine–grained level, for the purposes of this paper, treating the collective/social and the interpersonal as roughly analogous should suffice. Both can be considered 'social' insofar as any linguistic activity involving more than one person qualifies as social (or even collective). However, a distinction remains between smaller and larger groups or communities, as indicated in the discussion of the schizophrenic case in Section 3.

game" in *Blue Book* (1965) while considering different aspects of language use. In PI, he uses this term in two separate contexts: (1) to refer to a primitive language, which is a very simple language containing just a few nouns that can be used for specific purposes, such as facilitating communication between a builder and his assistant (PI §2), and (2) to denote different types of language use in ordinary language (PI §19). This distinction highlights Wittgenstein's broader claim that a language derives its meaning from use within specific contexts. Even the most sophisticated linguistic practices share foundational principles with simpler forms of communication.

Another important aspect of Wittgenstein's understanding of language is that there is no possibility of a private language (PI §§244–271) because the meaning of language is determined by its use in a shared social practice. In other words, meaning is not in the mind of an individual speaker but rather arises from a community's shared conventions and practices. The private language argument in PI was likely intended to refute logical atomism and its claim that there is an ideal language that best expresses what we refer to by everyday expressions and how words have meaning (Meyers and Waller 2009, 6). According to Wittgenstein, we are not interested in someone's inner processes as long as we can efficiently communicate using the same language game. If we cannot establish effective communication, we can simply say that we do not play the same language game. The central concern in this paper, however, is not with the private language argument per se, and it will, therefore, not be elaborated further.

It is also important to note that Wittgenstein sometimes made statements that might appear to contradict the notion of generality or rule–governedness advocated in this paper. One example is: "And is there not also the case where we play, and make up the rules as we go along? And even where we alter them — as we go along" (PI §83). However, this does not conflict with the perspective presented here. Linguistic practices can shape communication and establish norms even when they emerge in a piecemeal or contingent manner, as suggested in the quote. As rules are created, they simultaneously acquire a normative function, even if only in a local and provisional sense.

Cavell (1962, 69–71) likewise emphasizes that Wittgenstein's language games are not just rule–governed activities, but practices embedded in human forms of life. They derive their meaning not from strict logical rules but from the shared human activities and responses that constitute these forms of life. This highlights the non–foundational nature of language: Its rules and meanings emerge not from abstract principles but from the contingent, historical, and cultural contexts in which language is used. The idea that "grammar tells us what kind of object anything is" (PI §373) underscores this relationship between language and life: Our linguistic practices reflect

our shared modes of interacting with the world and each other. Also, this communal aspect of language underscores its normative function: Linguistic practices shape how we communicate and establish norms for what counts as meaningful, rational, or appropriate in a given form of life (see also Hanfling 1980).

John McDowell (1984) has also explored how Wittgenstein's reflections on rule–following further elaborate on the contingent and communal nature of language. He points out that abstract principles do not dictate meaning but emerge through practices where rules are embedded in forms of life. McDowell argues that following a rule cannot be reduced to private interpretation but must be understood as participation in a communal activity, where the meaning of a rule is demonstrated through its application in shared contexts (McDowell 1984, 330–332; see also Diamond 1989; Hertzberg 2014).

Thus, Wittgenstein underlines the importance of context in determining the meaning of language and contends that words do not have predetermined meanings but instead take on meaning based on the context in which they are used (PI §43). It follows that words have meanings corresponding to their use. If words like "insanity", "madness", and the names of different disorders, have their ordinary use in language, then, to play the same language games, speakers must use them in the same way. A similar procedure is present for some speech acts to be considered *performative* (in Austin's 1962 earlier terminology). For example, to successfully christen a ship, we must participate in a culture where this practice exists; we are authorized to do the naming, say the required words, break the bottle on the ship's edge, etc. (Cavell 2005, 165). However, the most important part here is that the community accepts the act, which is part of its form of life. Cavell (1962, 72–73) further clarifies that Wittgenstein's notion of "forms of life" resists reduction to mere biological or psychological conditions. Instead, it refers to the shared cultural and normative frameworks that give language its life. Therefore, language and its games are intimately tied to human interdependence and the interpretive practices that sustain social life.

These insights from Wittgenstein's philosophy can help us understand how language influences the perception of mental illness. For instance, cognitive therapists acknowledge that they are unable to prevent auditory hallucination experiences in psychosis. Instead, they work to alter their patients' perceptions of the voices they hear so that they are not alarmed by them or compelled to follow their instructions. This shift in perspective requires an understanding of how voices emerge from inner speech, with a failure of source tracking, in reaction to, for example, trauma. The voices articulate personal thoughts rather than the views or directives of others (Fischer 2018, 281).

3. *Language as a Normative Tool*

One of the most significant similarities between Wittgenstein's and Freud's approaches to language is their shared emphasis on the importance of context in understanding meaning. In both cases, language is not merely a descriptive tool but also a kind of normative practice. However, Wittgenstein's account of normativity is primarily concerned with grammatical and pragmatic frameworks that enable comprehension within a given form of life.[6] Freud's psychoanalytic approach, in contrast, highlights language's functional role in expressing and shaping unconscious conflicts.

For Freud, the normativity of language does not stem from deviations from expected linguistic patterns but rather from the universality of unconscious mechanisms that manifest through speech and symptoms. Psychoanalysis does not assume that a particular way of using language indicates mental health or pathology. Instead, it operates on the premise that symptoms appearing in speech are expressions of internal psychic processes present in all individuals. Freud consequently rejects a strict distinction between health and illness. Instead, he emphasizes that neurosis differs from everyday psychological struggles only by degree rather than in kind:

> Just as health and sickness are not different from each other in essence but are only separated by a quantitative line of demarcation which can be determined in practice, so the aim of the treatment will never be anything else but the practical recovery of the patient, the restoration of his ability to lead an active life and of his capacity for enjoyment. (SE 7, 251)

In other words, what Freud examines in his patients' speech is not a deviation from "normal" language but rather the ways in which unconscious conflicts symbolically express themselves through symptoms. In this sense, symptoms are not departures from normative linguistic patterns, but manifestations of universal psychological dynamics present in all people: "If you take up a theoretical point of view and disregard this matter of quantity, you may quite well say that we are all ill — that is, neurotic — since the preconditions for the formation of symptoms can also be observed in normal people." (SE 16, 358)

This perspective also allows Freud to extend his analysis beyond individuals to cultural phenomena. If neurotic processes exist at the individual level, then they can also be identified in societal structures and cultural patterns:

6 Recall from the previous section that this is not to say that such rules or governance occur across the board or in the kind of fixed manner that Wittgenstein objected to. Rules can be situated while still serving a normative function.

> I should find it very understandable if someone were to point out the obligatory nature of the course of human civilization and were to say, for instance, that the tendencies to a restriction of sexual life or to the institution of a humanitarian ideal at the expense of natural selection were developmental trends which cannot be averted or turned aside and to which it is best for us to yield as though they were necessities of nature. (SE 21, 145)

That being said, one could argue that there is a certain implicit normativity in Freud's therapeutic context — not in the sense of fixed linguistic rules but rather concerning the aims of psychoanalysis. Freud does not establish a universal norm of mental health based on deviations from expected linguistic patterns. Instead, he treats symptoms as expressions of internal conflicts and unconscious processes. The goal of psychoanalysis is not to align the patient's language with a socially accepted norm but to uncover repressed conflicts and enable a more functional life. In this sense, we might speak of a kind of "pragmatic normativity" in Freud's thought — a normativity oriented toward psychological functionality and the reduction of inner conflicts. Thus, while Freud does not offer normativity in Wittgenstein's sense, psychoanalysis still operates with an implicit pragmatic criterion: Therapy is not aimed at adapting individuals to the norms of a linguistic community but at understanding and alleviating inner conflicts.

The connection between language, normativity, and normality becomes particularly evident when considering examples of people with schizophrenia, whose use of language often challenges societal norms. Jay Haley (1969) explores how people with schizophrenia participate in familial and societal "games" and how their behavior can be understood as deviating from socially accepted communication rules. This aligns with Wittgenstein's concept of language games. Haley notes that people with schizophrenia often hold a central position in family dynamics, particularly in manipulating relationships within the family. For instance, they may adopt behaviors or strategies that are meaningful within the specific context of the family or institution but that deviate from broader societal norms. One striking example is Haley's description of a schizophrenic patient standing against the wall, arms outstretched and head hanging down, evoking the image of crucifixion. Within the hospital environment, the staff interpret this as an accusation that they are "crucifying" the patient. However, because the message is conveyed non–verbally and indirectly, it resists direct affirmation, denial, or refutation, creating a unique form of communication. Haley describes this as "the true art of schizophrenia," highlighting the patient's ability to navigate and manipulate the implicit rules of the smaller system (1969, 136–137).

This example illustrates the conflict between two forms of life: (1) the narrower form of life represented by the schizophrenic's immediate social environment (such as their family or the hospital staff) and (2) the broader form of life constituted by the larger community. Within the smaller system,

the schizophrenic's actions align with its implicit rules and expectations, reflecting participation in its language game. However, these actions deviate from the norms of the broader community, which operate under different rules for interpreting meaning and behavior. This disjunction highlights Wittgenstein's insight that meaning arises within specific forms of life, and actions that are meaningful in one system may appear nonsensical or "abnormal" in another.

Wittgenstein notes in *On Certainty* (OC): "If someone doubted whether the earth had existed for 100 years, I should not understand, for this reason: I would not know what such a person would still allow to be counted as evidence and what not." (§231) This observation underscores that understanding depends on shared criteria for judgment within a form of life. In the case of schizophrenia, the individual might operate coherently within the "language game" of their family or hospital. However, their actions and expressions could appear deviant when evaluated by societal standards.

From a Freudian perspective, this phenomenon can be understood as an expression of underlying unconscious conflicts that structure the patient's experience of reality. However, it is crucial to recognize that the patient is not inventing a private language or a wholly incomprehensible form of communication. On the contrary, by adopting the image of crucifixion — a powerful and widely recognized cultural and religious symbol — he is engaging with established patterns of meaning. His choice of expression suggests an awareness of shared symbolic structures, even if the way in which he conveys his message is unconventional. This aligns with Freud's broader claim that the distinction between normal and pathological expression is not absolute but rather one of degree. The patient's use of the crucifixion image, then, is not a breakdown of meaning. It is, rather, an intensified or dramatized form of symbolic expression, one that still operates within recognizable cultural frameworks. Thus, rather than seeing the schizophrenic patient's communicative act as a mere deviation from linguistic norms, a Freudian interpretation suggests that it is an attempt (however unconventional) to articulate internal conflicts using shared symbolic resources. This perspective challenges the idea that schizophrenia represents a complete rupture with normativity. Indeed, schizophrenia highlights how even extreme psychological states draw on and reshape familiar cultural and linguistic patterns.

4. *Language as a Therapeutic Tool*

The therapeutic potential of language, which can be considered a shared theme in Freud's and Wittgenstein's work, emerges from its capacity to describe and its role in reshaping our understanding of ourselves and the world. Both thinkers recognize that linguistic clarity — whether achieved

through psychoanalytic dialogue or grammatical investigation — has the power to alleviate confusion and psychological distress.

Wittgenstein's view of language highlights its profound influence on human experience and its potential role in therapeutic contexts.[7] Language, for Wittgenstein, is not just a medium for describing the world but a dynamic social practice that shapes how we think, perceive, and interact. He argues that many philosophical problems arise from misunderstandings about the workings of language, and resolving these problems involves a therapeutic process of clarifying linguistic confusion. Joel Backström has made a similar point. He states:

> [The] comparison with psychoanalysis seems to me significant ... it focuses attention on the way in which Wittgenstein's philosophical work is essentially 'therapeutic' insofar as he doesn't argue for the truth of one or other answer to the philosophically puzzling questions various phenomena seem to pose, but aims rather to change us ... (2013, 213; see also 2011)

This perspective aligns with Freud's psychoanalytic focus on language, where verbalizing repressed emotions helps patients confront their unconscious conflicts and achieve relief. Both Wittgenstein's grammatical inves-

7 There are three main interpretations of Wittgenstein's PI: the doctrinal, elucidatory, and therapeutic readings (Hutchinson 2007, 693).
1. The doctrinal reading treats Wittgenstein's work as a set of philosophical theses, such as the use–theory of meaning, logical behaviorism, and the rejection of private language. However, this interpretation conflicts with Wittgenstein's explicit rejection of philosophical theorizing (PI §§109, 126, 128).
2. The elucidatory reading (defended by Baker, Hacker, and Glock) sees Wittgenstein's method as offering perspicuous representations of linguistic structures. However, this approach presumes that language operates in a fixed and rule–governed manner, which does not completely align with Wittgenstein's emphasis on the fluidity of language.
3. The therapeutic reading (endorsed by Cavell, Hutchinson, and Baker in later work) understands Wittgenstein's philosophy as a form of therapy aimed at dissolving conceptual confusions rather than providing substantive philosophical doctrines. This interpretation remains the most consistent with Wittgenstein's methodological remarks and avoids the pitfalls of doctrinal and elucidatory approaches. It was introduced in Stanley Cavell's essay, *The Availability of Wittgenstein's Later Philosophy* (1962). More recent interpretations (e.g. Hutchinson 2007) see Wittgenstein's therapeutic approach as targeting mental disturbances brought about by struggling with philosophical problems. On this reading, philosophical confusion arises from being trapped in misleading conceptual pictures, and Wittgenstein's goal is to dissolve these confusions rather than address broader existential concerns.
This paper adopts the therapeutic reading as the most suitable framework for examining the relationship between language, normativity, and psychoanalysis. Yet, it also incorporates insights from the elucidatory reading, particularly in relation to Wittgenstein's method of clarifying linguistic structures. This combined approach enables a more nuanced comparison between Wittgenstein's method and Freud's interpretative practice. Specifically, it emphasizes these scholars' shared concern with resolving conceptual and psychological entanglements.

tigations and Freud's "talking cure" underscore the transformative power of language — not only to describe but to act.

As intimated, this interplay between language (as action) and therapy resonates with J. L. Austin's concept of performative utterances, where language does not merely describe reality but enacts change within it. In both Freudian psychoanalysis and Wittgensteinian grammatical analysis, the therapeutic function of language operates as a form of performative discourse. As Marie Guillot (2004) suggests, in Freudian analysis, the act of verbalizing repressed memories allows patients to confront their unconscious and experience emotional relief. Similarly, Wittgenstein's grammatical investigations serve to disentangle the conceptual confusion caused by language itself, demonstrating that "speech is at once the charm that leads thought astray, and the antidote that delivers it" (Guillot 2004, 260).

Wittgensteinian philosophy holds that philosophical issues should not be resolved by developing philosophical hypotheses but rather by "diagnostic" methods that "dissolve" them based on psycholinguistic understandings of "the workings of language" or other mechanisms that influence philosophical thought (Fischer 2018, 264). According to Glock, Wittgenstein considered that philosophy "dissolves the conceptual confusions to which philosophical problems are alleged to owe their existence" (1996, 294). Even from such an interpretation, it can follow that "[t]he philosopher treats a question as a disease" (PI §255). This exhibits the conception of Wittgenstein's own philosophical activity as a therapy for "diseases of thought". Thus, understanding the grammatical articulations of philosophical problems will prevent the appearance of new problems (Hacker 1990). In addition, for Wittgenstein, understanding the aim of philosophy can be considered therapeutic in the sense of "curing us of talking nonsense and of being tormented by problems that have no solution" (Kenny 1982, 28). Therefore, the conception of philosophy as practical therapy becomes even clearer: Therapy is a slow process in which the patients gain a new understanding of the nature of their problems, allowing them to recognize these problems and reach a kind of inner peace (McGinn 1997).

Similarly, psychoanalysis posits that the resolution of hysterical symptoms is contingent on the patient's ability to identify the root cause of her problem and express it appropriately. This process is analogous to the philosopher's task of transforming latent meaninglessness into patent meaninglessness, just as a psychoanalyst transforms latent emotions into patent emotions (Baker and Hacker 1980). Thus, according to Hacker (1985, 161), "[l]ike the psychoanalyst, all the philosopher does is make the patient aware of what he is doing," which gives the philosopher the desired peace of mind through the signification and explicitness of the problem. In *Philosophical Occasions* (PO), Wittgenstein argues that the work of the philosopher con-

sists of collecting memories for a particular purpose (PO, 173), which is very similar to what a psychoanalyst does. As Freud proposes, the role of a psychoanalyst is to gather memories to facilitate a patient's exploration of the underlying issue and enable her to release her emotional distress through a therapeutic–cathartic process.

Given the preceding discourse, it can be observed that psychoanalysis and the philosophical approach embodied by Wittgenstein are comparable in the following respects: both can be considered therapeutic modalities that aim to seek remedial or healing expressions that delineate erroneous thought patterns and retrieve memories that have contributed to living with unease. Thus, it can be concluded that both methods have the same goal: "We bring words back from their metaphysical use to their correct use in language" (PO, 167). In other words: "The philosopher tries to find the saving word, that is, the word which, in the end, allows us to grasp what, until now, has weighed ungraspably on our consciousness ... provides us with the word with which I can express the thing and render it harmless" (PO, 165).

The same can also be applied to psychoanalysis. According to Freud (1910, 2212), overcoming resistance is crucial. In general, resistances are the acts and words made by the person being analyzed that prevent them from accessing their own unconscious. Internal resistance in a patient constitutes an obstacle to the clarification that psychoanalysis aspires to. However, such resistance can be overcome. In Wittgenstein's terms, the removal of resistance can be expressed as the task of abandoning certain images that hold us captive (see also Backström 2013; Majetschak 2010). However, how can an individual disengage from an image with a strong hold on them? Wittgenstein proposes scrutinizing the propositions and evaluating their practical application to refute or mitigate these resistances (as mentioned in PO, 165).

Resistances are the obstacles that stand in the way of making connections. Thus, a therapy process aims to restore the ability to make them; it helps us acquire a more contextual view of our lives and situate ourselves coherently in the world. The meaning of an affirmation is discovered by looking at its relationships with others and by attending to the practices with which it is connected. For instance, the passages of OC exhibit patient work with the radical skeptic to help them understand that there is no point in maintaining the image (of knowledge, of reality, of themselves) to which their position is committed (OC §1, §24, §51, §115, §166, §204). The person concerned must be willing to carry out complex, patient work to overcome resistance. Wittgenstein's perspective highlights that the challenge of overcoming resistance lies not in intellectual capacity but in the willpower required to confront the prevailing perceptions of the majority.

In Freud's case, the patient sometimes strongly resists psychoanalytic treatment due to the repression of specific desires. For Freud, repression is

a conflict–related defense operation that the ego employs — an operation that is only partially unconscious (1910, 2230; see also Backström 2013). Repression can be described as a mechanism that separates and keeps the conscious at a distance. Freud emphasizes that to evoke or express repressed desires, one must first remove an obstacle that appears to be the person's will. The following is a key point of Freud's "dynamic" conception of the unconscious: Desires and memories are not simply unconscious; they are actively repressed by people, thereby rendering them unconscious. In other words, we throw them out of the conscious realm through repression. This implies that ignorance is actually an unwillingness to know. In this context, it can be concluded that overcoming these resistances is the main goal of psychoanalytic treatment.

John Heaton (2013, 2014) has notably considered Wittgenstein's understanding of philosophy and identified similarities to the psychoanalytic conception of therapy (Backström 2013 considers Wittgenstein to be a "follower" of Freud).[8] Recalling Wittgenstein's notion of philosophy as therapy, philosophical problems must be addressed therapeutically due to a "misinterpretation of our linguistic forms" (PI §111). This is linked to a practical–existential version that claims that these philosophical problems entail restlessness, uneasiness, and a lack of inner peace.

The above notion implies that Wittgenstein worked on elucidating what complicates us: certain deeply rooted ways of thinking and speaking that dominate us. This affirms what he says in *Culture and Value* (CV): "Language sets everyone the same traps; it is an immense network of easily accessible wrong turnings" (CV, 18). Thus, Wittgenstein treats philosophical questions as problems caused by "features of our language and our intellectual dispositions" (Baker and Hacker 1980, 287). He views philosophy and philosophical work as "working on oneself. On one's own interpretation. On one's way of seeing things. (And what one expects of them)" (CV, 16).

The problems conceptualized by Freudian psychoanalysis are putatively produced by childhood traumas (Baker and Hacker 1980, 287). These elucidate unconscious elements that torment us to understand what is happening in our mind and lead us toward healing. However, it should be noted that Freud's interest in this claim was practical, never philosophical (although, undoubtedly, philosophical problems inevitably awaited around the corner). Thus, both Wittgenstein and Freud undertake the task of understanding problems hidden from us and exhibit their struggle against them through understanding and dissolution. It is difficult to change anything in language

8 There are, however, dissenting voices. James Peterman (1992) has, for instance, suggested that Wittgenstein's understanding of therapy is closer to that found in the work of ancient philosophers than to Freud's. The similarities between Wittgenstein's and Freud's views should, nonetheless, be apparent by now.

because it is a part of social practice and changes slowly over time. Nonetheless, philosophy — as a tool for clarifying one's thoughts — can help us better understand ourselves, no matter the common use of language expressions.

Conclusion

This paper has compared Freud's and Wittgenstein's approaches to language, emphasizing their shared focus on its normativity and therapeutic potential. Both thinkers regard language as a transformative and therapeutic tool, highlighting its role not only in diagnosing and addressing psychological difficulties but also in shaping human experience. This perspective underscores the importance of a culturally sensitive and holistic approach to therapy. In such an approach, language functions as both (a) a diagnostic and therapeutic instrument and (b) a means for navigating the complexities of individual experience and societal norms.

Exploring Freud's psychoanalytic stance and Wittgenstein's philosophical perspective on language reveals the profound role of language in shaping our understanding of mental life. Admittedly, these scholars' approaches differ in focus; Freud emphasizes the unconscious while Wittgenstein underscores the social dimensions of meaning. That said, both thinkers highlight that language is not merely a neutral conduit for communication but an active force in structuring thought and experience. However, unlike Wittgenstein, for whom normativity in language is grounded in shared social practices, Freud's perspective suggests that linguistic expression is shaped by both social conventions and unconscious mechanisms that influence how individuals articulate their desires, conflicts, and anxieties. Rather than viewing language as a system that strictly defines what is normal or abnormal, Freud underscores that deviations in speech and behavior do not necessarily indicate a break from normativity. They are, instead, expressions of universal psychic structures. From this perspective, language plays a dual role: It both reflects and reshapes the tensions between individual subjectivity and broader social frameworks.

Freud's insights into the unconscious highlight that symbolic expressions — such as slips of the tongue or symptoms — operate within their own implicit "rules," thereby reflecting deeper conflicts and repressed desires. Wittgenstein, in turn, demonstrates that meaning emerges from communal language games and shared forms of life. Here, the rules of communication are negotiated within specific cultural and social contexts. Together, Freud's and Wittgenstein's perspectives illuminate the nature of language as a collective phenomenon, whether on a small or large scale. This paper also intimates that language understood this way is capable of bridging personal

subjectivity and communal norms. This suggests that the role of language in mental health extends beyond diagnostic or therapeutic applications to encompass a broader understanding of the frameworks that shape human behavior and perception. While Freud and Wittgenstein emphasize the transformative and therapeutic capacities of language, their approaches also caution against an overly narrow focus on linguistic norms. Instead, they call for a more expansive perspective, one that incorporates the patient's unique cultural and linguistic background.

In modern psychotherapy, Wittgenstein's concepts of language games and forms of life can provide valuable tools for interpreting how patients use language to navigate their realities. Similarly, Freud's emphasis on the unconscious and the symbolic dimension of language underscores the importance of addressing underlying conflicts that may resist direct articulation. Together, these insights advocate for a holistic approach to mental health, one that bridges philosophical, psychoanalytic, and cultural dimensions.

Ultimately, while Freud and Wittgenstein offer rich frameworks for understanding the intersection of language and mental health, their work also invites further exploration. Contemporary mental health practices can benefit from integrating these perspectives, particularly in recognizing the normative power of language to define, constrain, and expand human experience. However, this integration must remain attuned to the broader socio–cultural contexts that shape both language and mental health. This can ensure that therapeutic practices evolve alongside the diverse realities of human life.

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Sažetak

NORMATIVNOST JEZIČNIH IGARA U KONTEKSTU PSIHOANALIZE I MENTALNOGA ZDRAVLJA

INES SKELAC

Jezik uvelike oblikuje ljudsku percepciju i društvenu interakciju. Sigmund Freud je naglašavao ulogu jezika u otkrivanju i rješavanju nesvjesnih sukoba, osobito u liječenju mentalnih poremećaja. Ludwig Wittgenstein je istraživao svakidašnju upotrebu jezika uvodeći pojam jezičnih igara kojima je otkrio njegovu normativnu funkciju u oblikovanju značenja, ponašanja i društvenih normi. Ovaj rad uspoređuje Freudov i Wittgensteinov pristup jeziku ističući njihovo zajedničko naglašavanje njegove normativnosti i terapijskog potencijala. Iako se njihovi pristupi razlikuju — Freud se usredotočuje na nesvjesne strukture koje oblikuju govor, dok Wittgenstein naglašava pravila koja upravljaju upotrebom jezika — oba autora pokazuju da jezik nije pasivan medij, nego ima aktivnu ulogu u oblikovanju ljudskoga iskustva. Konačno, rad argumentira da Freudovi uvidi u simboličke dimenzije jezika i Wittgensteinovo naglašavanje jezične prakse zajedno upućuju na potrebu za kulturološki osjetljivim i holističkim pristupom psihoterapiji.

KLJUČNE RIJEČI: Sigmund Freud, jezik, jezične igre, psihoanaliza, Ludwig Wittgenstein

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